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DEPT. FOR JAN LEVIN, DRL/IRF FOR MATTHEW SCHMOLESKY, EAP/C

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: CHINA AND THE HOLY SEE: SANT'EGIDIO PURSUE INFORMAL DIALOGUE

AMIDST SOME HOPEFUL SIGNS OF THAW

REF: VATICAN 000477, TAIPEI 002553

CLASSIFIED BY: D. Brent Hardt, Charge D'Affaires, EXEC, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶11. (C) Valeria Martano of Vatican-linked Sant'Egidio Community discussed the group's ongoing initiative to promote Catholic dialogue with China in a meeting with Poloffs May 20. Sant'Egidio's initiative focuses on resolving internal differences between the underground and Patriotic churches to lay the foundation for future official talks on diplomatic relations. Despite Sant'Egidio's commitment to dialogue, they are still waiting for evidence of commitment to the process from the Chinese side. Vatican officials are aware of Sant'Egidio's efforts, and welcome them as a potentially helpful building block, but make clear that these efforts are independent and would in no way substitute for official Vatican-China talks. End Summary.

Sant'Egidio's dialogue with China

¶12. (C) Valeria Martano, the Community of Sant'Egidio's China expert, reviewed with Poloffs in a May 20 meeting the Community's current initiatives to promote dialogue with mainland Chinese. She maintained that this informal dialogue on religious freedom occurs with the knowledge and quiet approval of the Holy See. Chinese participants in the dialogue include officials who serve on official government bodies. Sant'Egidio's engagement strategy is to work with contacts who have leverage with Chinese authorities, but to avoid formal diplomatic channels that have been ineffective and unsatisfactory for both the Holy See and the Chinese government. Martano said this engagement strategy follows the model adopted during negotiations on the status of the Catholic Church that preceded the turnover of Hong Kong to mainland China.

Domestic before Diplomatic relations with the Church

¶13. (C) Martano said Sant'Egidio believes that an essential precondition for the eventual establishment of relations and recognition of the Church's presence in China is the resolution of internal issues surrounding the Catholic Church's presence in the country. Martano pointed out that a major obstacle to dialogue was the sheer number of official organizations with authority over China's internal "harmony," which led to multiple interlocutors with overlapping influence. Furthermore, independent or foreign-regulated organizations are perceived as threats to control and social harmony. For example, Martano cited Chinese concerns about the Holy See's control over appointing bishops. To address these concerns, she felt that some form of "continued Chinese government involvement along the lines of the Vietnam solution -- which Sant'Egidio proposed to the Chinese and involves Government review of decisions made by the Holy See -- could alleviate some of the Chinese authorities' anxieties."

Divisions Among Chinese Catholics

¶14. (C) Another focus for Sant'Egidio is to address continuing divisions among Chinese Catholics. Some older underground bishops and laity, particularly those who have experienced persecution and imprisonment, oppose reconciliation with Patriotic Church Catholics, particularly in Hebei and Xian provinces. Martano told us that the younger generation of bishops and laity do not make the same Underground/Patriotic Church distinction; for example, many provincial underground Catholics worship in a Patriotic community when they move to urban areas to find work. Martano said that Sant'Egidio's dialogue hopes to bring together the two elements of the Catholic Church in China to facilitate reconciliation. She noted that patriotic and underground seminarians study together at Rome's Pontifical Urban University, contributing to a deeper

understanding of the others' viewpoint and experience.

Taiwan

15. (C) Martano argued that diplomatic relations between China and the Holy See would depend in part on informal efforts to resolve outstanding issues before any official negotiations took place. She said the Chinese authorities continue to insist that the Holy See break diplomatic relations with Taiwan before moving on to discuss control over appointment of bishops, while the Holy See wants it the other way around. The Holy See has not appointed a nuncio to Taipei since 1972, and is represented in Taiwan by a Charge d'Affaires. The Holy See has publicly stated that it would end its diplomatic relations with Taiwan immediately if the PRC would allow the Church to operate in China.

16. (C) Vatican China Country Director, Monsignor Gianfranco Rota-Graziosi was pessimistic about any possibility of diplomatic relations with China in the near future. He said, "the Vatican has seen no signs of good will, no concrete evidence of improvement." With regard to Sant'Egidio's dialogue, he was aware of their program but he said that he had not seen evidence that it was achieving concrete results.

17. (C) Likewise, the Holy See's Deputy Foreign Minister equivalent, Monsignor Pietro Parolin, told the Charge June 10 that, despite some positive signs during the period of papal transition, the Holy See had seen nothing to indicate that China was prepared to alter its basic positions on relations with the Holy See. He too acknowledged that the Holy See was aware of Sant'Egidio's initiative, but went out of his way to make clear that whatever Sant'Egidio did was no substitute for direct contact between the Holy See and the Chinese government. The Holy See recognized the importance of establishing a dialogue outside of official levels, and of building understanding of the Catholic Church at local and provincial levels, and therefore appreciated Sant'Egidio's efforts. At the same time, they were not expecting any breakthroughs with the Chinese government to result from Sant'Egidio's engagement. Overall, Parolin remained skeptical that major progress with China was likely anytime soon, given the Chinese government's penchant for retaining complete control over religious institutions.

18. (C) In a separate discussion, American Monsignor James Green, who now heads the English Section in the Secretariat of State and had previously served as Charge d'affaires in Taipei, said he has been advocating a harder line with China. He believes China will only respond realistically when the Holy See makes it clear that China is not the demander in the relationship, and that it is as much in China's interest as the Holy See's to improve relations. He noted that with the Beijing Olympics around the corner in 2008 and the steady international pressure for greater religious freedom, he believed China would come to see accommodation with the Holy See as being in its interest and act accordingly. He believes the Holy See's current "soft" approach has only made the Chinese dig in harder to their intractable positions.

Comment

19. (C) Despite her belief in engagement through dialogue, Martano emphasized that Chinese authorities don't yet see much value added from diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Given China's current almost unrestricted international economic engagement, it sees no realpolitik "need" for the moment for formal relations with the Holy See or expanded freedom for the Catholic Church. As Martano pointed out, "everyone wants to do business with China and will continue doing so whether they have relations with the Holy See or not." Sant'Egidio has asked the Chinese for signs of "good will," such as the release of imprisoned clergy, that would indicate they value dialogue and the possibility of future diplomatic relations with the Holy See. So far they have yet to receive any concrete evidence that the dialogue had born fruit.

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